

## Digital Archives and the Music of Victorian Poetry

As Phyllis Weliver has just demonstrated, Victorian poems were performed not only as public readings, but also as song. Emily Tennyson's settings of her husband's poems are only some examples of a common phenomenon in the Victorian period. Some settings were even considered greater successes as songs than poems: although critics disparaged Tennyson's poem *Maud*, Michael William Balfe's and Sir Arthur Somervell's wildly popular settings of "Come into the Garden Maud" gave the monodrama a vibrant musical afterlife. Such settings, premiered in ballad concerts by the most famous artists of the day, gave voice to the silent song of printed poetry and put it on the stage, while the increased availability of affordable sheet music and pianos enabled Victorians to bring these songs into their own parlors. As a result, much of the British public may have been more familiar with now-canonical poems through their musical versions than through the silence of the page. These song settings are not mere ephemera or quaint historical oddities: each musical setting is, according to musicologist Lawrence Kramer, "a reading, in the critical as well as the performative sense of the term: an activity of interpretation that works through a text without being bound by authorial intentions" (Kramer 127). Such musical interpretations often participate in debates surrounding the meanings of poems themselves, and since these musical readings were at least as well known as contemporaneous literary interpretations, these songs more fully elucidate the poems that served as their lyrics.

Sound studies, and sound studies of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, are experiencing a resurgence in literary criticism: however, academic arguments involving sound are nearly impossible to make in traditional print media. An article could print an

excerpt of a score, but only scholars who can read music would be able to understand it. Likewise, articles or books could include audio files externally, as did Nicholas Temperley's special edition of *Victorian Studies* that included a cassette tape with the songs discussed in the articles (Temperley 1986). However, these solutions do not address the central problem: readers will have difficulty finding the exact musical phrases mentioned in articles, and those with less musical expertise are left out of the conversation entirely. More recently, digital archives such as the UCSB's "English Broadside Ballad Archive" (EBBA) (<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>) and the "Romantic-Era Songs" project (<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/douglass/music/index.html>) helpfully bring musical settings to the fore, but neither incorporates the audio with the score. Newer options for incorporating music in academic articles include SoundCite (<http://soundcite.knightlab.com/>), a tool that lets users embed sound clips in websites, Scalar (<http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/>), a publishing framework that lets users annotate media, and the strategy of assigning QR codes for each audio excerpt and inserting them into a print article, as Jennifer Wood suggests (Wood 2013). None of these options integrates the audio with the score: SoundCite will only let users hear the audio, Scalar only supports textual annotations of media files, and QR codes require readers to have smart phones, which vastly limits the audience for the article. To address these problems, I have built two tools with the funding and support of the Scholars' Lab and NINES at the University of Virginia: "Songs of the Victorians" (<http://www.songsofthevictorians.com>), an archive and analysis of musical settings of Victorian poems with an interactive framework where each measure of a score is highlighted in time with the music, and "Augmented Notes"

(<http://www.augmentednotes.com>), a public humanities tool to let users who do not know how to program build their own archives like “Songs of the Victorians.”

“Songs of the Victorians” melds the archive and the scholarly article. It examines both high- and low-brow Victorian musical settings of contemporaneous poetry by integrating the scores, audio files, and scholarly analytical commentary in an interactive environment to help the user understand both the literary and musical elements of the argument. As an archive, it provides audio files of each song and archival quality scans of first edition printings of each score. For every song, the user can listen to the audio while each measure of the score is highlighted in time with the music, as the archive page for Michael William Balfe’s setting of Tennyson’s “Come into the Garden Maud” demonstrates (<<http://www.songsofthevictorians.com/balfe/archive>>). The project also functions as a scholarly article in which each song includes an analysis of the song’s interpretation of the text. When the commentary discusses a particular measure, the users can click on an icon of a speaker, which will show them the relevant section of the audio file and highlight the score so they can hear for themselves the effect the commentary describes.

Let’s look at the analysis page for Caroline Norton’s “Juanita” for an example. Caroline Norton was well-known in the period not only for her songs and poems, but also for her activism: she campaigned vigorously to have custody over her children after she left her abusive husband (men got custody in all cases) and right after she published this song, she campaigned for married women’s rights to own property (her husband got all the royalties from her artistic ventures, including this song, and her activism helped pass the Married Woman’s Property Act of 1870). In the analysis section for this song, after

discussing the song's lyrics and paratextual material, I argue that it seems like a traditional love song in which a man asks a woman to marry him, but it actually critiques such relationships. We can see this in a musical allusion: the melody for the words "Nita! Juanita" and the ensuing two beats is a musical quotation from the soprano aria "Lascia ch'io pianga" from Handel's opera *Rinaldo* (1711). In this song, a woman named Almirena, who has been imprisoned, laments her fate (<http://www.songsofthevictorians.com/norton/analysis.html>). By including a musical quotation about imprisonment and pain on our titular character's name, Norton argues that being pursued and married is like being imprisoned, and that Juanita, like Norton herself, wishes for freedom from a husband. This argument would be harder to make in print: the pieces are not in the same key so they would not look the same even though the intervals are identical. With audio united with score, however, users can hear the similarities between the excerpts. Unlike a print article with an MP3 or CD, "Songs of the Victorians" lets my readers hear the exact excerpts I want them to hear so they can better understand and believe my argument.

"Songs of the Victorians" includes Norton's "Juanita," Balfe's parlor song setting of "Come into the Garden, Maud," Sir Arthur Somervell's art song setting of the same text, and Sir Arthur Sullivan's setting of Adelaide Procter's "A Lost Chord." I selected these songs to begin my archive, first, because they encompass both the parlor and the art song, and second, because they were all extremely popular at the time, and therefore many Victorians would have been more familiar with the interpretations of the poem as mediated by the song than with the poem on its own. More generally, this new framework that enables critics to describe musical arguments to non-musicians will

facilitate this interdisciplinary approach of bringing music and literature together. It also preserves the musical and cultural afterlives of well-known poems, as many of these scores have either disintegrated and been lost to time or are only available in select libraries: since “Songs of the Victorians” is free and open access, it can help make scholarship more equitable by granting academics, from graduate students to endowed chairs, access to items that they would otherwise require extensive travel funding or a sabbatical to view. It has also been used by those outside the academy: a few weeks after its launch, I received an email from a user in the UK who learned how to play and sing “Come into the Garden Maud” from the archive page so he could perform it for residents in care homes who had requested it. “Songs of the Victorians” empowers users from both within and without the academy to access these works that held such importance to the Victorians.

[Although I have currently chosen to privilege depth over breadth in creating this archive, I plan to expand “Songs of the Victorians” by accepting submissions and turning it into a nineteenth century sound studies journal with a substantial archival component, and I’d be happy to talk with anyone who is interested after the panel.]

**[SWITCH to AUGNOTES]** After the success of “Songs of the Victorians,” I used its framework to produce “Augmented Notes” (<http://www.augmentednotes.com>), a generalized, public humanities tool to let scholars develop their own archives like mine. “Augmented Notes” eliminates the need for users to understand programming by creating archive pages, like those from “Songs of the Victorians,” which users can tweak and design. It is simple to use, as the site only requires audio files and images of the score to produce an archive page. After the audio and image files are uploaded, users are taken to

a page where they click and drag to draw boxes around each measure (they can also edit the sizes and order of these boxes), indicating what portion of the score should be highlighted when that measure plays.

Users can also optionally upload MEI files--the TEI-based scholarly standard XML markup for music--of scores if they wish to record the position for each highlighting box via that method. They then set the time at which the highlighting box changes position through a “time editing” page.

The site brings together the measure and time information, saving them in a JSON file, which enables each measure of the song to be highlighted in time with the music. Users then click "Download zip" to download a zip file with the html, css, and javascript files necessary for a complete archive page, which they can then style themselves. Augmented Notes” also has a sandbox (<http://www.augmentednotes.com/example>) through which users who would like to experiment with the technology but do not themselves have the requisite files can make their own website. **[DEMO SANDBOX]**

“Augmented Notes” is already being used by scholars, both to generate archives (such as the “Romantic Era Lyrics” project from the University of South Carolina) and to generate interactive scores for use in music classrooms. Since this tool produces websites with integrated audio and score, it empowers users to preserve cultural archives, whether their materials include classical music, unpublished manuscripts, popular music, or folk music and traditional tunes from around the globe.

In fact, the Victorians themselves were interested in preserving their own musical and poetic cultural archive: the very act of recording poetry and composing musical

settings of Victorian poetry, with which Phyllis began our discussion today, participates in the same anxieties that concerned poetic voice itself. Eric Griffiths argued that as a result of Victorian print culture, written text instead of a unitary poetic voice (61), has “a mute polyphony through which we see rather than hear alternatively possible voicings” (Griffiths 66); I believe that song settings give voice to certain strands of this fictive mute polyphony. The popularity of both musical settings and recording technology seems to have come out of a desire to affix voice to the silent polyphony of poetry; in a song setting, the pitches and notes will always be the same, while in a recording by the author, the voice is fixed to its “original,” as though the authentic voice has been produced. However, neither of these projects can fully achieve its goal: the individual performer’s interpretation breaks free from the printed score’s instructions, and the recording distorts the voice by having it become what Yopie Prins has dubbed a “mechanical (re)production detached from [the speaker]” (49). As the Victorians themselves were aware, the process of fixing sound was doomed to fail; precisely this is what made it a central preoccupation, endlessly repeated throughout the century. In preserving a nineteenth-century cultural archive of musical settings, “Songs of the Victorians” is itself a Victorian endeavor: it uses new technology to collect, analyze, and bring together music and poetry by giving a voice to the silent page. I hope this project will make such interdisciplinary scholarship accessible to non-specialists and help us all become better attuned to this musical poetry and poetic music.

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